



Maine Education Association
Jesse Hargrove President | Beth French Vice President | Jaye Rich Treasurer
Rebecca Cole NEA Director | Rachelle Bristol Executive Director

Testimony

In Opposition To

LD 206: An Act to Protect Maine Businesses by Eliminating the Automatic Cost-of-Living Adjustment to the Minimum Hourly Wage

Jan Kosinski, Government Relations Director, Maine Education Association

Before the Labor Committee

March 25th, 2025

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and other members of the Labor Committee,

My name is Jan Kosinski, and I am the Director of Government Relations for the Maine Education Association (MEA). The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators, including teachers and other educators in nearly every public school in the state, as well as full-time faculty and other professional and support staff in both the University of Maine and Community College systems. Thousands of retired educators continue their connection and advocacy work through the MEA- Retired program.

I offer this testimony today on behalf of the MEA in OPPOSITION to LD 206, *An Act to Protect Maine Businesses by Eliminating the Automatic Cost-of-living Adjustment to the Minimum Hourly Wage*.

First, this legislation is directly contrary to what voters passed in 2016 when they passed Question 4 to raise the minimum wage in our state and tie the future increases to inflation. I played a very tangential role in this referendum campaign, but when I talked to voters, they were exasperated by the lack of progress on this issue. For many years, elected officials were unable to find a pathway to increase our state's minimum wage – so voters decided. Passing LD 206 would insert elected officials again into a settled debate that voters have settled for us. Question 4 was a clear and simple question. Fifty-five percent of the voters in the state approved Question 4. Over 770,000 voters cast ballots in that election and over 420,000 Maine voters cast a YES vote for Question 4. Passing LD 206 would undermine the votes and the expressed desire of Maine citizens.

I will remind the Committee the federal minimum wage is still, sadly, a paltry \$7.25 per hour. And I will also remind the Committee Maine's minimum wage was only slightly better at \$7.50 per hour, a rate that was established in 2009 and remained in place until the 2016 initiative was passed by voters.

The MEA supports the minimum wage initiative because the minimum wage and the annual inflationary increases directly impact the lowest paid school employees. We were elated last session the Legislature, in bipartisan fashion, passed a new requirement that ties the minimum wage for ed techs and other hourly school support staff to the state minimum wage. Starting in July, ed techs can expect to be paid at least 125% of the state minimum wage, and other hourly paid employees such as bus drivers, custodians, food service workers and secretaries can expect to be paid no less than 115% of the state minimum wage, with increases every year as the state's minimum wage increases. I must note, the 125%/115% new minimum wage for hourly school support staff was a compromise. Republicans on the Education Committee originally proposed lifting the minimum wage for ed techs to 200% of the state minimum wage and 150% for all other hourly employees. The Education Committee came together and unanimously approved 150% for ed techs and 125% for all other hourly school employees, but the

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budget only provided funding for the more moderate 125%/115% approach, thus giving even more importance to the annual cost of living increases. Someday we hope the pay for hourly school staff will meet the demands of the job.

Lastly, we support the current minimum wage law because we know there are parents who make the minimum wage, and they send their kids to public schools. Parents of children do not have the luxury of waiting for elected officials to raise the minimum wage, especially during a time of uncertain, uneven, and volatile inflation. Raising children on the minimum wage is challenging already and this bill will only make it harder. For these reasons, we oppose this bill and hope the Committee will vote unanimously "ought not to pass."

Thank you for your attention and your service to the people of Maine. I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.

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